

GENETICS SOCIETY OF AMERICA
COMMITTEE ON HISTORICAL DOCUMENTS

Committee

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George D. Snell	Frederick B. Churchill, <u>ex officio</u>	812-337-7522

January 29, 1978

Dr. Paul Berg
Department of Biochemistry
Stanford University
School of Medicine
Stanford, California 94305

Dear Dr. Berg:


I hope you are one of those who appreciate and approve the objectives of historians of science. If so, you will also approve the recent action of David Perkins, shortly before the end of his term as President of the Genetics Society. He appointed a Committee on Historical Materials and charged it with the task of alerting geneticists to the desirability of saving materials of historical interest and arranging for their safe deposition, and with the task of surveying and inventorying such material so that future historians could more readily find what they need. I am writing to you with all of that in mind.

Consultation with historians, archivists and librarians has led to a list, which I enclose, of the kinds of materials that should be saved and deposited.

Your role in the development of genetics has obviously been so outstanding that it is of special importance to do all we can to induce you to make now provision for the safe preservation of your materials either in the archives or library of your own institution or in a national facility such as the library of the American Philosophical Society. In case you have any reticence about doing so yourself, I would--with your permission--gladly approach the institution of your choice.

I look forward hopefully to a letter from you saying that you are willing to cooperate and advising me of your preference for a depository.

Sincerely yours,


T. M. Sonneborn

TMS:nla
Enc.

Documentation of the History of Genetics

Consultations with historians of science, archivists and librarians suggest that the following kinds of items should be saved and deposited:

1. Letters when they contain more than mere family chit-chat and when not consciously fabricated or altered 'for the record'. Letters from minor figures are held often to be more revealing than guarded letters from major personages. Extended exchanges about scientific matters, institutions, personalities and extra-scientific matters of consequence are also important. Letters and even scribbles of important geneticists may come to be solely in the hands of others on whom their preservation depends. Arrangements can (and perhaps should normally) be made to protect the writer and subjects involved for an extended period. The same safeguards can apply as desired to any of the following.
2. All diaries.
3. Applications for grant support and annual reports of progress.
4. Reports on students, research projects, grant proposals, referee reports, letters of recommendation.
5. Photographs, identified and dated, and other memorabilia.
6. Biographical and autobiographical sketches.
7. Ephemera, crank letters, and unfruitful papers (published or unpublished). Such items may tell a lot about the cultural setting for scientific research and even dead-end research projects may reveal much about the nature of scientific growth.
8. Documents (letters, minutes, reports) concerning institutions, scientific societies, committees and journals.
9. Complete lists of students, post-docs and assistants are enormously useful.